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C O N F I R M A T I O N,
As now Settled in the
C H U R C H
O F
E N G L A N D.

In a DISCOURSE

On *Act*. 8. 17.

By HENRY STEBBING, M. A. Rector
of GARBOLDISHAM in NORFOLK.

C A M B R I D G E, *d*

Printed for CORNELIUS CROWNFIELD:
and Sold by JOHN CROWNFIELD, at
the *Rising-Sun*, in St. Paul's Church-Yard,
L O N D O N, 1729.

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PREFACE.

THIS Discourse, which I drew up, not long since, for the Instruction of my own Parishes, I now take leave to offer, (with some few Additions and Amendments) to publick use: Not without hopes that it may do something towards recommending the Practice of what I take to be a very important Duty, which yet is many times either altogether neglected or very ill performed, because, perhaps, it is not rightly understood. As to that part of it which concerns the Ratification of the Baptismal Vow, I hope I need make no Apology for it. In what I have offered in defence of Sacerdotal Benediction, I am sensible I may be in danger of displeasing some; Those, I mean, on the one hand, who think the least that can be said for it, too much; and those on the other, to whom what is here laid down
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may

THE PREFACE.

may appear too little. To the first, I have no more to say at present, than what they will meet with in the Discourse it self; and the last I shall only desire to consider this, That as I intended this Treatise for the benefit of common Readers, so I have Industriously avoided entering into any disputes which I thought might be useless to plain understandings; and that what I have said, tho' less perhaps than the Subject would bear, will not, I hope, be found inconsistent with any thing else that may reasonably be advanced upon it, in a more learned way. I have no more to add, but to beg the blessing of God upon this humble Offering, to the honour of the Christian worship, and the candid and favourable acceptance of all who may think it worth their while to peruse it.



ACTS VIII. 17.

Then laid they their hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost.

IN the foregoing part of this Chapter we have an account of the success that *Philip* met with among the *Samaritans* in converting and baptizing *Simon* the Sorcerer and his followers. The News of which reaching the *Apostles* which were at *Jerusalem*; they sent unto them *Peter* and *John*, who when they were come down prayed for them that they might receive the HOLY GHOST vers. 14, 15. And it appears from the Text that they asked not in vain; for when they laid their hands on them they received the HOLY GHOST.

BY receiving the Holy Ghost, is meant receiving the Gifts of the Holy Ghost; and what these Gifts were we may learn from what follows vers. 18, 19. where we are told that when *Simon* saw that through the laying on of the *Apostles* hands the HOLY GHOST was given, he offered them Money saying

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ing give me also this Power that on whomsoever I lay hands he may receive the HOLY GHOST. By this it appears that the Gift of the Holy Ghost, which these new Converts received in consequence of the laying on of the Apostles hands, was attended with some visible effect. Some thing there was which *Simon* saw that was wonderful and surprizing, and which tempted him (in hopes without doubt, of new Gains) to make this wicked offer. And what could this be but the Gift of Tongues, or some such like Miraculous Power, which the Apostles having themselves received at the day of *Pentecost* were now made the Instruments of communicating to others for the general use and benefit of the Church? But there is no need of Conjectures in this case; for we meet with another instance of the like sort *Chap. 19. verse 6.* where it is expressly said of *certain Disciples at Ephesus who were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*, that *when Paul had laid his hands upon them the HOLY GHOST came on them and they spake with Tongues and Prophesied.*

I SHALL make no farther use at present of this piece of Scripture History than as it may serve as an Introduction to what I intend to offer concerning CONFIRMATION, as it is now practiced in the Church of *England*, which it is my design to explain and vindicate. The general intent of this order
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is, I presume, well enough understood to be this *viz.* That those who have been baptized in their Infancy (which is the case of almost all Christians now adays) should, when they come to Years of Discretion, *renew the solemn Vow and Promise which was made in their names at their Baptism; ratifying and confirming the same in their own Persons, and acknowledging themselves bound to believe and do all those things which their Godfathers and Godmothers undertook for them.* Which promise every one making distinctly for himself, the Bishop after this lays his hand upon the head of each of them and blesses them in these words. *Defend O Lord, this thy Servant with thy Heavenly Grace that he may continue thine forever, and daily increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more until he come to thine everlasting Kingdom.* So that here are two things to be considered in reference to this order *viz.* 1. The Stipulation antecedent to Confirmation, or the Engagement which every Person takes upon himself to believe and do as his Godfathers and Godmothers promised for him, 2. The Act of the Bishop in laying on of hands and praying that God would give him the Grace of his Holy Spirit to enable him to answer this engagement. To both which Points I shall speak as largely as the time before me will admit.

I. As to the first, *viz.* The ratifying and confirming the Vow made in our Baptism;

it is to be observed that our Church requires this of every Person as a Qualification in order to his being admitted to the Holy Communion. For the Rubrick expressly ordains that ** none shall be admitted to the Holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed.* Which I mention to shew you that the Promise made in Confirmation is not required upon a supposition that the baptismal Vow made by our Godfathers and Godmothers in our name, is weak and insufficient for the purpose to which it was intended; but that by this second engagement we may give Evidence to the Church or Society of Christians of our sense of the Obligation we are under in virtue of the first. The offering us to Baptism whilst we are Infants, is an act of our Parents, and of our Godfathers and Godmothers on our behalf. And by being Baptized, we are actually admitted as Members of Christ's Church, and have a Title to the promises of the Gospel, in case we should dye in our Infancy. But, forasmuch as the Promises made on the part of God, suppose the performance of the Conditions stipulated on ours; it follows that our assent to, or acquiescence in, that which our Godfathers and Godmothers transacted in our name, at any time after we are come to years of Discretion, does as strongly bind

* Rubr. After the Confirmation Office

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us as if we had transacted the same thing in our own Persons. So that, I say, Baptism has all its force full and entire antecedently to this engagement which we make in Confirmation. But of our assent to our Baptismal Covenant, the Church can no otherwise be made sensible than by some publick act of ours declaring that Assent, and this is what we give when we are Confirmed.

THUS far then, I think, there is no Man who will seriously consider the thing, but must allow the order of the Church to be highly reasonable. For the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, being the most solemn Ordinance of the Gospel, peculiar to those who are within the Covenant, it should never be administred but to those concerning whose Faith the Church has sufficient security; which the having been Baptized in our Infancy, considered as separate from all Personal Acts subsequent to it, does not seem to be. You will say, perhaps, that a Person's resorting regularly to the publick Assemblies of Christians, and joyning in Prayer from time to time as he grows up to years of Discretion, is an Evidence of his Assent to the Baptismal Covenant; and in Charity it ought to be so esteemed. But as it is certain, that young Persons are brought to Church at first more out of Custom and by the Influence of their Pa-

rents, than out of Judgment and Choice; this sort of Evidence cannot have that weight and significancy in it, that a direct engagement has, which is solemnly entered into before the Bishop, as the Superior Officer of the Church. It is true that as young Persons may come to Church merely out of Custom, so they may offer themselves to be Confirmed out of Custom; and this, I am afraid, is many times the case. But that which a Person is required to do but once in his life time, is not so apt to be look't upon as a thing of Course, as that which he is call'd upon to do every day. The frequency of any thing naturally disposes careless men to make light of it, how important soever it may be in it self: What is done but once or seldom and that with more special marks of Solemnity, is generally more taken notice of.

It is of little weight with me that no such Declaration or Engagement, was ever required in the Primitive Church for some hundreds of years. The Practice of the ancient Church is, in the main, a safe and a good rule to follow, but not an infallible one. The general Edification of Christians, is the first and supreme Law of Ecclesiastical Discipline; and as there may sometimes be good Reasons for departing from some Customs then in use, so there may be as good Reasons for introducing others which were

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were not then thought of. It is very likely that by that time Discipline began to be a little settled, That Custom had introduced it self, which is now every where exploded, of giving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to Infants, as well as to grown Persons. Whilst this Practice subsisted, there was scarce room for requiring such a Declaration as is now required in the order of Confirmation. For why should any new Engagement have been required, in order to qualify Persons for that, for which the customary use and administration of it from there Infancy supposed them qualified all along? But whatever were the Reasons (and certainly there were great ones) for altering this Custom, the same are also Reasons that will justify the present order in this case. For these Reasons must all of them end in this general one, *viz.* That those who come to the Lord's Table, should come with Knowledge and Discretion. Some proof then should be given of this Knowledge and Discretion; and what more proper proof can be given, than the declaring, after due Examination, their Assent and Consent to the Vow and Promise made in their Names at their Baptism, it is not easy for the art of Man to find out,

It has been made a Question by some, whether in case any Person, not having had an opportunity of being Confirmed, has

once been admitted to partake of the Lord's Table, he can, properly, offer himself to receive Confirmation afterwards. The Reason of the doubt is, that there can be no occasion for such a one to ratify the Vow made in his Baptism, of which the very act of receiving the Lord's Supper is as firm a ratification as can be given. Now the thing is true, that a Man can give no stronger Evidence of his Faith in Christ, nor make any plainer Declaration of his Purpose and resolution to live according to his Will, than by receiving the Lord's Supper. But it is to be considered that the ratification of the Baptismal Vow, is not Confirmation but something antecedent to it, as I have observed just now. Confirmation is the Act of the Bishop in laying on of Hands, and Praying to God for the aid of his Spirit. This is not yet done; and why the having Communicated is a reason that it should never be done, it is a difficult matter for me to apprehend. The Bishop's Blessing I presume, will not be less effectual because a Person has received the Communion; and if there is no necessity after this of ratifying the Baptismal Vow, there will at least be no harm in it, especially considering that the Evidence given to the Church in a private Congregation, is now offered before the Bishop in a more publick manner.

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THE difficulty would be somewhat greater if it were asked, Whether if any Person baptized after he is come to years of Discretion, has made the Vow and Promise in his own name, there is any occasion for him to be Confirmed. Now in this case the order of our Church is plain and express, which says, *that it is expedient that every Person thus baptized should be confirmed by the Bishop so soon after his Baptism as conveniently may be, that so he may be admitted to the holy Communion.* It is very certain that such a Person cannot rightly answer to the Bishop that he ratifies the Promise made by his Godfathers and Godmothers in his name, because his Godfathers and Godmothers promised nothing for him; but he may receive the Bishop's Blessing in laying on of hands and solemnly invoking the presence of the Holy Ghost; which I presume is all that the Rubrick means in recommending it to such Persons to come to be confirmed.

THIS order of our Church, though conformable to the practice of the most early Times, may not perhaps please those who look upon the Bishop's Blessing to be purely a matter of Form; which is a Point that I shall speak to in its proper place. Mean while I will take notice of one thing as a very plain and obvious consequence from what has been said, *viz.* That no Persons baptized in Infancy should offer themselves
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to receive Confirmation, but such as are able to give a reasonable account of their Faith, and have well considered what it is that they take upon themselves. Anciently when Confirmation was not attended with any previous stipulation on the part of the Person to be confirmed, it was administered immediately after Baptism, as well to Infants as to grown Persons, and so it might be now under the like Circumstance. But since the usage is altered, and Confirmation, at present, stands connected with a personal engagement; nothing in the World can be more absurd than the offering such to be confirmed who are under no capacity of entering into any such engagement. The reason why Persons are required to renew their Baptismal Vow, is because in Baptism That was promised in their names of which they understood nothing themselves. If they understand as little of it when they come to be confirmed, the matter is not one bit mended, and they might as reasonably be admitted to Communion in consequence of Baptism alone, as in consequence of that and Confirmation both.

I HAVE dwelt the longer upon the Ratification of the Baptismal Vow previous to Confirmation, because I take it to be a very material Point; and the reasons of it being such as fall within the reach of any plain understanding, I hope that what I have said may

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may have some influence upon those whom it most of all concerns to take notice of it, I mean Parents and Masters of Families. I forbear to mention Godfathers and Godmothers as Persons in whom I can place very little confidence, and who in general shew themselves so unconcerned about the charge they take upon themselves when they bring Children to the Font; that what was at first a wise and a pious Provision is now become a daily and a publick Scandal in the Church. But Parents who have so close an interest in the welfare of their Children, should be a little more careful in this matter, and not act in such a manner as if the having them Christened were only giving them a Name, and it were of no consequence whether they ever understood any thing of what was then transacted in their Names. I have scarce time to tell you of the many good effects that would follow if young Persons were as regularly brought to Confirmation as they are brought to Baptism, provided they were taught, not to run to it as to a Show, but, to approach it with that reverence, decency and preparation, which the weight and solemnity of the Office requires. One I shall mention, which lays the foundation for all the rest, *viz.* That it would be a great security to that too much neglected duty of Catechizing. A Clergyman would then look upon the Youth of his

his Parish as those of whose proficiency in Christian Knowledge he must be obliged, when time shall serve, to render an account to his Superior, and would be ashamed to present them before the Bishop to stand there as so many witnesses of his neglect. Parents would consider the thing in the same light, and the reasons of their diligence in doing their part would be greater in proportion as the Obligations they are under are stronger. Under this influence both on the part of their Parents and also on the part of their Parish Ministers, I think that generally speaking Children could not fail of attaining to a competent knowledge of the Christian Faith by that time they come to years of discretion. And this would remove one Objection against the practice of Infant-baptism, which is, that Children being admitted into the Covenant whilst they are incapable of understanding the Terms and Conditions of it, are too easily apt to forget that they are Christians. The Objection has weight enough in it to be felt were there not more weighty Reasons to ballance on the other side. But the weight of it would be a great deal less, if care were taken that they should constantly be put in mind of their Baptismal Vow, and trained up in such a sense of their duty as to be ready at any time when they are grown up to make the same Profession for themselves, which their
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Godfathers and Godmothers made heretofore in their names.

THUS much for the Promise or Engagement antecedent to Confirmation. I proceed now to consider

2. THE Act of the Bishop in laying on of Hands, and praying for the Aids of God's holy Spirit. In treating upon which Subject, I am sensible that great Prejudices will lye against me at a time when every attempt to give the Clergy any degree of distinction above other Men, is treated as mere Craft and Imposture. But not regarding any such Prejudices as these, which, considered only as Prejudices, it is certain, deserve no regard, I shall shortly and plainly say what I think to be agreeable to the word of God, and leave every sober and serious Christian to judge of it according to his Discretion.

I lay it down then as the Foundation upon which I intend to build, That *it is God* who, by his holy Spirit *worketh in us both to will and to do according to his good pleasure*; and that the means appointed by God as ordinarily necessary to procure us the aids of his Spirit is PRAYER. These are Principles which all Christians may well be supposed to admit. We must see then what can be gathered from the Scriptures to bring these Principles home to the Point under Consideration.

MY first Observation arises naturally from the Text which is this, That it seemed not meet to the wisdom of God to entrust the power of dispensing or procuring the EXTRAORDINARY Gifts of the Holy Ghost to all Men indifferently but to the Ministers of the Church of a particular order. *Philip* was no Apostle but a Deacon under Commission to baptize and preach the Gospel. In virtue of this Commission he goes among the *Samaritans* where he converts and baptizes many. But they received not the Holy Ghost till the Apostles came and laid their hands upon them, and prayed that they might receive it. Of how little use soever this Observation may seem to us at this time a day which is not an Age of Miracles, and the laying on of Bishops hands is not attended with any extraordinary effects; it will yet secure, I think, this general Principle *viz.* That there is no absurdity in supposing that the Gifts of the Spirit may be left, in the order of God, to depend a good deal upon the Administrations of Men, and that we may obtain that help by the Prayers of others which we are not able to procure by our own. Some modern Reasoners are fond enough of asking, Why cannot every Christian pray for himself, or one Christian pray for another to as good a purpose as a Priest or a Bishop? But might not the same Question as well have been put in the Instance
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now before us? Might it not then have been asked, Why must *Peter* and *John* be sent for to pray for the Holy Ghost? Why cannot *Philip* do it as well as they, or any other Christian as well as *Philip*? Had such reasoning been offered in those times, the weakness of it would have appeared by the event, and the Analogy that there is between all cases of this sort will at any time afford a sufficient Answer to all such Questions as these.

WHEN *Naaman* the Syrian was order'd by *Elisba* the Prophet to go and wash seven times in *Jordan* in order to be cured of his Leprosy, he answered in the true Language of a Free-thinker, Why to *Jordan*? Are not *Abana* and *Pharpar* rivers of *Damascus*, better than all the waters of *Israel*? May I not wash in them and be clean? 2. Kings 5. 12. The folly of this Question is obvious. It was not the Water that was to cure his Leprosy, but the Power of God; and if God thought not fit to exert that Power but in consequence of his washing in *Jordan*, he must submit to the application, or forego the benefit. In like manner; it was not *Peter* or *John* who gave the Holy Ghost but God himself: But since God would not bestow the Holy Ghost without their Prayers intervening, they that would not have submitted to the means, must have gone without the Blessing.

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I offer not this as a direct proof to shew that God has made the *ordinary* Graces of his Spirit to depend upon the Prayers of a Bishop, but only to prepare you to judge of this matter with a little Temper, and that you may not be disposed upon mere prejudice; to set aside the notion as absurd, without hearing what may be reasonably alledged from the Scripture in support of it. You see in fact that God did think fit to make the *extraordinary* Gifts of the Holy Ghost dependent upon the Prayers of the Apostles; and should it be said that he has also made his *ordinary* Gifts dependent upon the Prayers of those who should succeed them in their Office, there would be no greater difficulty in conceiving this than there is in conceiving the other. But the Question is whether this be true; And in answer to it I say in the first place, That it is very certain that God hath not made the ordinary graces of his Spirit so to depend upon the Prayers of the Ministers of the Church of whatever order they be, as that they may not be obtained without them; for God has promised to *give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him*, that is to *all* that ask him; *Luk. 11. 13.* and there can be no question, but that all who apply to him with an humble dependance upon his goodness, and a readiness of disposition to obey his will, shall be vouchsafed so much assistance

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ance as is necessary to enable them to do well. But this is to be understood not exclusive of, but in conjunction with, all other helps, which the Wisdom of God hath thought fit to appoint as useful to this purpose; of which sort I take to be the desiring the Prayers of all good Christians on our behalf, and especially, and above all, of the Ministers of his Word, who have it in special trust, as a part of their Office, to pray for and bless the People. It was the Character of the Tribe of *Levi*, as distinguished from all other Tribes, that they were to *stand before the Lord, to minister unto him and bless in his name.* Deut. 10. 8. And if you look to *Numb.* 6. 24. you will find, that the Blessing which they were to pronounce has no sort of reference to any extraordinary or miraculous Gifts; for it runs in these words, *The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.* After which it presently follows, *And they (Aaron and his Sons) shall put my name upon the Children of Israel, and I WILL BLESS THEM.* Nor let it be said that this was a thing peculiar to the *Levitical* Priesthood. For why should it be peculiar to the *Levitical* Priesthood? Or what is there in this Prayer which will not as well suit the mouth of a Christian Bishop as of a Son of *Aaron*? It is easy enough to conceive that

the bringing in of a better hope, by the Preaching of the Gospel, necessarily created a change in the Administrations of the Priesthood, so far as they concerned the Law of *Moses* as such. But what has this to do with the Law of *Moses*? To bless the People in the name of God, appertained to the Office of those who were set apart to minister in holy things long before *Moses*, as appears from the instance of *Melchisedeck*, who being a Priest of the most high God, blessed Abraham. Gen. 14. 18, 19. And I believe it will be difficult to assign any reason or use of it under one Dispensation which will not as well hold under all.

BUT there is one passage in St. *James* which I think, fully clears this Point, as shewing that even in ordinary Cases, praying for the People, *in the name of God*, was an Office specially committed to the Pastors of the Church. *Is any Sick among you? Let him call for the Elders of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with Oyl in the name of the Lord, and the Prayer of Faith shall save the Sick, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he have committed Sins they shall be forgiven him.* Jam. 5. 14, 14. Sicknefs is a very common accident of Life; and why were the Elders of the Church to be called upon to pray over the Sick, if any body else could have done it to as good a purpose as they? Some Commentators, I know will have it that

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that the *Healing* here mentioned was a *Miraculous* Healing; but I can see no reason to follow them. For tho' it is very certain, from the History of the New Testament, that many Miraculous Cures were wrought by the first Preachers of the Gospel; it is scarce credible that Instances of this sort were so frequent as to justify the laying it down as an universal Rule to all Sick Persons, to call for the Elders of the Church, without difference or distinction, to cure them by a Miracle. The circumstance of *anointing with Oyl* proves nothing Miraculous; since this was a common medicinal application in use among the *Jews*; nor is there any thing in the Passage which implies any more than this *viz.* That those who were sick should send for the Ministers of the Church, as Persons specially appointed by God to implore the blessing of his Providence, and to obtain for them (if to his wisdom it should seem meet) the cure of their Distempers, and the forgiveness of their sins. If some were to be cured Miraculously it is certain that all were not to be so cured; and the Apostle's rule must be understood to take in both cases alike, because it prescribes a means equally proper in both. It is not to be supposed that sickness was the only case in which the Ministers of the Church were to pray for the People. They were to do it upon all fitting and proper

occasions, of which we have multitudes of examples in Holy Scripture. But above all others, remarkable to our purpose are these, and such like forms, with which St. Paul concludes almost all his Epistles, *The peace of God be with you — Grace be with you all — The Lord Jesus be with you — The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all;* which have as much the Air and Stile of a solemn Benediction pronounced by a Person in Authority, as that in the Old Testament before mentioned, *The Lord bless thee and keep thee &c.*

IF you would know a reason why the Office of praying for the People is specially committed to the Pastors of the Church, tho' this is a Question which it little concerns me to answer; yet, it may not be improper to say thus much; viz. That to them is committed the Administration of all the outward Ordinances of the Gospel. This naturally creates mutual obligations between Pastors and People, a due regard to which on both sides is that which properly constitutes the order of the visible Church of Christ; to secure which a fitter means could not have been contrived, than the laying it as a duty incumbent upon the former, above all others, to be advocates and intercessors with God for the rest. This is a constant and even visible admonition to the Clergy
them.

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themselves, with how much care and tenderness they ought to watch over and feed *the Flock of Christ committed to their charge*, and what Vigilance and Circumspection they ought to shew in their own Lives and Conversations; that they who are bound to sanctify others to God by their Prayers may keep themselves holy and undefiled. And (if I may say it without offence) it is a reason to the People to hold them in esteem *for their works sake*, that they are made Instruments in the hand of God to convey to them the Blessings of his Grace, herein bearing, in some sort, the Image of their common Lord and Master, *the one Mediator between God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus.*

It being a Duty then specially incumbent upon the Pastors of the Church to pray for the People; this naturally supposes a duty on the part of the People to apply to them for their Prayers, or at least to accept of their prayers when seasonably offered. And this being done in obedience to Christ, becomes a publick Act of Faith and Trust in him, and is rewardable as such. It would be a very weak thing to ask how much the Prayers of a Christian Minister will do more than the Prayers of any other Person. We know not the Effects of our own Prayers, nor are we able to say at any time, What Graces we have gained by the Devotion of the Day, nor what we might

have lost by the neglect of them. But there may come a time when we shall be sensible of these things, and in the mean while this we may assure our selves, that there is no one who does his Duty with an honest and good heart, who shall not find his account in it at the last; and that how confident soever we may be of the Virtue of those Prayers which we offer up for our selves, it is not a proper way of recommending our selves to God to make scorn of the Prayers of any on our behalf, much less of the Prayers of those who have it in special Commission to *bless in his name*. The Wisdom of God prescribes nothing in vain; and when he has made any thing to be our duty, Who shall presume to say that it will be as well for us whether we do it or whether we let it alone? We feel no present, sensible change in our selves upon receiving the Prayers of the Priesthood; nor do we feel any such change upon praying in our Closets, or in the Church, or upon receiving the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, unless it be that we are more serious and devout for the time, and go away more confirmed in good Resolutions; which, if it be not our own faults, we may also find in this duty as well as in any of the rest. But any effects beyond these are not to be expected, because they are inconsistent with that gradual and familiar way by which the Holy Spirit

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Spirit worketh Grace in our Hearts, which, in our Saviour's comparison, is, *as when a Man casteth Seed into the Earth and it springeth and groweth up he knoweth not how.* Mark 4. 26, 27. In all these cases therefore, it is the proper work of Faith, and trust in God, to rest satisfied in this, that HE hath said I WILL BLESS YOU, whose goodness we are not to call in question, because we cannot determine the particular effect which every distinct act of Religion produces, nor because he chuseth to help our Infirmities by such means as we do not perceive, nor are able to comprehend.

WHAT has hitherto been said concerns the Prayers of the Priesthood in a general view. Upon what occasions, with what restrictions to the Clergy of this or that particular Order, and under what Circumstances of Solemnity, they are to be offered up; are Matters which Ecclesiastical Discipline must determine. And certainly if there is any occasion which will justify a greater degree of Solemnity than the rest, it is when we are called upon to make our first personal acknowledgment of the Obligation we are under to the Law of Christ, and of our Resolutions to live according to his will. One mark of this solemnity is the *Laying on of Hands*; an ancient usage, not only in the case of Benediction, but also in the designation of Persons to any State
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or Office of Trust. Another is, That according to the present Order and Constitutions of our Church, it is to be performed by the Bishop, and by him only. If you ask the Reason of this, you may take notice that all Spiritual Powers are, under Christ, originally in the Bishop, and may not be exercised by any other Persons but by Authority and Commission received from him. And that as Deacons are ordinarily vested with Authority to preach the word, and administer one of the Sacraments; and Presbyters or Priests have commission to administer both; so the Bishops have reserved the power of Confirmation (as well as of Ordination) entirely to themselves; which has ever been the practice of the Christian Church, excepting some extraordinary cases, in which the power of Confirmation was sometimes granted to Presbyters. So that tho' it is certain that Presbyters might now Confirm, if the Bishops should think fit to give them Authority so to do; yet it is also certain that should they any where presume to do it, without such Authority, they would be guilty of a breach of Order; and in that case we are not to expect the approbation of God, *who is not the Author of Confusion but of Peace.*

I HAVE now laid before you so much as I think is necessary to explain and vindicate the Office of Confirmation as practised in the

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the Church of *England*; and if what has been said be duly considered, I should hope that no serious Christian can be at a loss to know how to behave when he is called upon to have it administered to him. Whether he shall appear before the Bishop, and with reverence and in the fear of God receive his Prayers for the succours of his Grace; or whether he shall turn his back in Contempt and cry, What signifies a Bishop's Blessing? In its place and order it signifies as much as any other act of positive Religion; and I will presume to say, that whatever be the Principles which lead Men to make light of their duty in this case, those same Principles if pursued in their consequences, will lead them to despise any other Ordinance of the Gospel. There is one thing very apt to prejudice weak Minds in judging of this matter which I shall just take notice of, I mean, a mistaken notion, as if it were pretended, that a Bishop by a mere act of Authority could certainly and infallibly convey or withhold a Blessing; a pretence so full of Absurdities that I confess, I know not to what Sect of Christians to go to dispose of it honestly. The Church of *England* I am sure has no such claim, nor can any reasonable Man judge otherwise than thus, That the Prayers of a Bishop prevail in consequence of the promise of God, declaring that he will accept them on our behalf. But the promise of
God

God is not absolute, who doth not make us the offers of his Grace in consequence of the use of any means, but upon supposition that we our selves are duly qualified to receive it.

GIVE me leave now to close up this Discourse with a word or two of advice to those, who intend to offer themselves to receive Confirmation. I have already observed to you, how necessary it is for such to be so far instructed in the Christian Doctrine; as to know the full sense and import of their Baptismal Vow, and what they promise when they take it upon themselves, and therefore shall say no more to it here. But next to this there is another thing of equal Importance, which is, that they come prepared with a serious and firm Resolution to continue in well doing, without which the outward Profession which they make is but mockery to God, and a cheat upon themselves. Let us consider that when we draw nigh unto God, we have to do with the searcher of Hearts, who will require a strict account how we have behaved our selves in consequence of our repeated Vows and Promises. And it is for this very end that he requires such engagements from us, that the Remembrance of them may be a constant check upon our Minds, when we find our selves inclined to give way to the Temptations of the World, and to do wickedly.

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Order of CONFIRMATION. 27

It is to this purpose in particular, that we are commanded frequently to partake of the Sacrament of Christ's blessed Body and Blood, for which every Person who hath been Confirmed, ought forthwith to be preparing himself, unless, thro' over hastiness, he hath been Confirmed too soon; in which case I would not advise, that when he hath done one rash thing he should go presently and do another. But, supposing a Person when he receives Confirmation, to be of a fit Age and Discretion for it, he ought (at least after some reasonable time of Tryal, to see how he keeps to his first Vow) to come to the Lord's Table; and he who defers it long is guilty of great inconsistency, since it is certain that there is nothing that can disqualify him for one, which will not also disqualify him for both.



F I N I S.

CONFESSION

It is to be supposed in particular that we
are constrained frequently to partake of the
Sacrament of Christ's blessed Body and Blood
for which every Christian who hath been Con-
firmed is bound forthwith to be preparing
himself, and is thus exhorted, he hath
been Confirmed, I too look for it, which call I
would not advise him when he hath done
one thing, he should be ready to do
to another, and thus his preparation when
he takes Communion, to be of a piece
and Disposition, he ought to be
for some reasonable time of Day, to be
how he goes to his duty, to come to
the Lord's Table; and he who does it
ought to be at some intention, and
it is certain that there is nothing that can
be done for one which will not be

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